

WORD MIGRATION IN THE ORIENT

By DR. EMMO GEHR

In May 1942 this magazine published "The Strange Case of Leprosy," by Dr. Gehr, an article which aroused much interest among our readers. Dr. Gehr, who at that time was living in Tokyo, has now moved to the Leper Asylum in Chiang-mai, Thailand, to continue his research work there. But, like many of his professional colleagues, he devotes his spare time to other intellectual pursuits. For many years Dr. Gehr has been a student of languages and can read more than a score of them. In the following pages he outlines some of the ideas which he has formed in the field of comparative languages. The study of this subject is a relatively new science, and many are the disputes among its adherents. Not all our readers may agree with every conclusion reached by Dr. Gehr or with the transcriptions he uses, but probably all will find the article stimulating reading.—K.M.

WORDS migrate around the globe just like races and people and their ideas, their cultures, and their commercial products. Just as human races are divided into peoples, tribes, and clans, so do languages, idioms, and dialects evolve. That branch of research dealing with these processes is known as the "science of comparative languages."

A dry, dull business? Far from it; it is thrilling and—dangerous. Dangerous in that many an enthusiast with insufficient training and superficial knowledge has landed himself in the wildest speculations, claiming, for instance, the close relationship between the Chinese and ancient Egyptian language and script. However, even within the limits of well-substantiated facts this branch of science is fascinating enough, and the expert is able to trace many an event in the history of culture by it.

"MAN" FROM INDIA

Centuries before our age of airplanes, express steamers, and railways, the advanced cultures of the earth were in close touch, influencing and stimulating each other. Among the principal of these cultural centers were those of China/Japan, of ancient India, of Persia/Arabia, and of the Greek Occident. Many of the European and Asiatic languages have their roots in Sanskrit-Pali. Take the word "man," for example: it comes from the Sanskrit, is *manush* in Bengali, appears in Malayan as *manusia*, in Thai as *manut*, and has become *Mensch* in German and "man" in English. Or the Sanskrit *pitar* (father): Bengali—*pita*; Persian—*peder*; Greek—*patēr*; Latin—*pater*; French—*père*;

German—*Vater*; and so on. "Sister" is in Bengali *sahodara* (*bhagini*); in Malayan *saudara*; in Russian *syestrā*; and in Europe *Schwester*, *soeur*, *suora*, etc. The Bengali word *bhrata* is the Russian *brat*, the German *Bruder*, the English "brother." The number "ten" is *dasan* in Sanskrit and *Zend*, *tasn* in Armenian, *diesitz* in Russian, *dėszimt* in Lithuanian, *deka* in Greek, *decem* in Latin, *deich* in old Irish, *taihun* in Gothic, *zehn* in German.

The case of the word "fire" is a remarkable one. The Indian *agni* became the Latin *ignis*. But most European languages derive their equivalent from the Greek *pyr*: from this evolved *Feuer*, "fire," *feu*, *fuego*, and *fuoco*. And now watch out! This is where it gets dangerous in the sense just mentioned: the Thai word for fire is *fai*; the Hakkas in South China say *fat*, the Fukienese *oah*, the Annamites *hoa*, the Northern Chinese *huo* (火), and the Japanese finally pronounce it *hi*. The close similarity in the pronunciation of "h" and "f" is revealed, for example, by the new Japanese romanization, according to which Mount Fuji must now be written "Huzi." So we have *huo*—*fuoco*, *fat*—*fai*—*feu* and *hi*, all no doubt very similar. But it seems equally certain that the word used in the Sino-Japanese sphere of culture is not identical with that of the Indo-European sphere. What we have here is a convergent development, i.e., for more or less haphazard reasons words of the same content are also similar in sound.

But still more mysterious processes can be traced. In Asia as in Europe, every infant says to its mother: *ma*, *mama*, *ma-*

man—not because it recalls the “common human original language” (in all probability this has never existed), but because this sound is the simplest one for the human mouth to produce. So every baby happily gurgles *ma-ma-ma-ma* to itself and does not mean anything by it at first. But as the mother is always closest to it, the most important “object” of its environment and hence the first one to be given a name, this first sound becomes the term for her.

TEA AND SAGO

The cultures of Greater East Asia have always been closely linked with each other. Each of the nations has experienced a period of florescence, once possessed a mighty empire, and allowed neighbors near and far to participate in its cultural achievements. Hence it is not surprising that words and expressions also underwent numerous migrations and changes in this part of the world. In fact, some of them accompanied Oriental products and culture all over the globe, just as East Asia has received ideas, goods, and words in exchange from India, the Near East, and Europe since time immemorial. There are many examples. Let us look at a few.

Wherever tea is drunk, this delicious beverage is known either as *thé*, *Tee*, “tea” (originally also pronounced “tay”) or as *ch’a* (茶), *sha* or *ché* (Annamite). Where did these words originate? Where did tea come from? Probably the plant itself did not originally come from China. But the first reports of tea—as a medicine and beverage—were brought to Europe in 1559 by the Dutch, who called it *thee*, because the Chinese merchants in Fukien from whom they obtained it pronounced the Northern Chinese *ch’a* as *te*. Approximately at the same time, however, the Portuguese brought the beverage to Europe but, instead of from Fukien, from Kwangtung Province, where the word is pronounced *ch’a*. As a result, Portugal still calls it *sha*, in contrast to the rest of Western and Central Europe. While the precious little leaves traveled to Western and Central Europe by sea, they reached Russia by caravan overland. Unlike the sea voyages, which started from Southern Chinese coastal cities, the overland transport set out from Northwest China, where tea is called *ch’a*; consequently, it is known as *ch’a* or *ch’ai* in all Slavic languages.

Sago also conquered the world from the East: the Malayan *sagu*, Thai *saku*, came to Fukien as *sia-ko-bi* (謝高米), which the

Hakkas in Kwangtung pronounce *sa-kuk-mi*. In North China it is known as *hsi-kuo-mi* (西國米; pronounced *sai-kuok-mai* in Cantonese) and *kuang-lang-mien* (杭柳麵) as well as *sha-ku-mi* (沙谷米). So we see that the name “sago” penetrated all languages that possess a word for it at all.

A Chinese word that traveled around the globe is *ta-feng* (大風), in Hakka and Cantonese *thai-fung*, Fukienese *toa-hong*, Bengali *tuphân*, the “great wind” or typhoon. In Japan the same Chinese characters are pronounced *ō-kaze*, which also means great wind.

A Javanese word that has found acceptance in European languages is “batik.” The Malayan *orang utan*, meaning “man of the woods,” has even become a semiscientific term for an anthropoid ape—on the strength of an error. European travelers expressed amazement at the apes they had observed in the interior; the coastal inhabitants of Borneo misunderstood their description, thinking that by “manlike apes” or “apelike men” the Europeans meant the wild pygmy tribes they knew as “men of the woods.” The Europeans, however, had never seen these shy jungle dwellers. And so the name “man of the woods” was attributed to the apes.

COFFEE IN THE EAST

To return to beverages: if the Orient produced tea, the Occident contributed coffee to the gratification of mankind. The Japanese got to know *koffie* through the Dutch and still call it *kohi*. In China and southeastern Asia it was introduced by the Arabs themselves; so the Chinese say *k’a-fei* and the Thais *ga-fū*—derived from the Arabic *kahva* or *kahve*. The Dutch also brought the cup (“*een kopje koffie!*”) to Japan; hence the Dutch *kop* became the Japanese *koppu*. The Arabian word “alcohol” migrated to Japan (*arukōru*) with the Dutch; in Thailand (*ālgohol*) it was introduced by the English; Europe, which owes so much to Arab sciences, took over the word directly; in China, on the other hand, the expression *chiu-ching* (酒精) was coined, analogous to the English “spirits of wine.”

The earliest travelers anywhere in the world and at all times were probably merchants and missionaries, adventurers and scientists. The merchants in particular always took along their national culture and civilization into foreign countries, enriching the languages of those countries—far more

so than the messengers of ideas and ideals, the missionaries. (After all, there are considerably more people who appreciate coffee or tea than are converted to the Moham-medan or Christian faith!) Not until later does the scholar act as the transmitter of scientific terms. In the East it was in former times the Portuguese, Dutch, and Arabs who were chiefly active as foreign merchants, and Chinese and Malays as native ones. Their travels covered the whole of this vast region: countless linguistic traces bear witness to this. To this day the Malay and the Thailer use the Portuguese word *lelang* for "auction." Butter is known in Malayan as *mantega*, likewise Portuguese. Bread came as *pão* to Japan (*pan*) and Thailand (*kanom pang*); phonetically the Portuguese word also appears in the Chinese *mien-pao* (麵包), and it may have influenced the choice of the character. Soap (Portuguese: *sabão*) became *shabon* in the land of the Rising Sun, *sabon* in Malayan, *sabu* in Thai, and *sap-bun* in Fukienese. The Portuguese word *meski* means "although, even, though" in Malayan and became the household word "maskee" on the China Coast, in the sense of "never mind" or "so what!"

INDIAN AND CHINESE TERMS

The neighboring regions of Thailand and Malai, situated as they are between the Indian and the Chinese spheres of culture, contain many borrowed terms from both these spheres in their languages. Thus, from the Sanskrit-Pali, we find in Malayan *rupa* (form), *manusia* (mankind), *bumi* (earth), *seterū* (enemy), *pereksa* (examine); and in Thai *rup*, *manut*, *pumi*, *sadrā*, and *priksa* with the same meanings. Since the original home of the Thais was in Yunnan, they may have brought along many a Chinese word in ancient times to their new home. Among these might possibly be terms such as *pie* (plait; Chinese: *pien* 辮), *un* (warm; Chinese: *wen* 温 or Cantonese: *wan*), *ngōn* (money; Chinese: *yin* 銀, Fukienese: *gun*, *gin*, Hakka: *nyun*, Cantonese: *ngan*).

But even in more recent times Chinese merchants have introduced many a term into these two languages, for example *kung-szu* (公司), pronounced, of course, as the Fukienese do (*kong-si*), meaning company. The Malayan word is *kongsi*, in Thai it is *gongsi* (office). The "master," "tuan," is in Malai *tauke* (towkay); it would be hard to recognize the Northern Chinese *t'ou-chia* (頭家) in it. But in South China

we find the Cantonese *t'au-ka*, the Hakka *theu-ka*, and finally the Fukienese *thau-ke*. In Thai it is *tauge* (leader).

The newcomer, the greenhorn, is in Indonesia and Malai a *singkek* or *singkeh*. It is the Chinese *hsin-k'e* (新客, new guest), which the Fukienese pronounce *sin-kheh*. Incidentally, *kheh* (guest), Cantonese *haak* and Hakka *hak*, is in South China the name for the Hakka tribe (客家, guest people), which immigrated from North China. In Japanese *k'e*, *kheh*, *hak* has become *kyak(u)*, the final "u" hardly being pronounced.

FROM "DARAIBAN" TO "SARONG"

In East Asia, Japan has always represented the great reservoir for all cultural influences of the globe, absorbing, testing, and transforming them. Minoru Umegaki expressed this very well in his interesting article on "Japanese Words of Foreign Origin" (*Contemporary Japan*, November 1943): "Our traditional self-preservation spirit urges us to nationalize things foreign in our own way for indigenous enrichment." And: "Just as Japanese culture is intimately associated with Chinese culture, so our language has close relations with that of the continent." And this in spite of the fact that Japanese and Chinese, far from being related languages, belong to two entirely different language families.

In addition to many European words, some of which we have already mentioned—to which we might add such further old and new examples as *daraiban* from the Dutch *draaibank* (lathe), *meriyasu* from the Spanish *medias* (hosiery, knitted goods), and *naifu*, *teburu*, *aisukurimu*, *shatsu* from the English knife, table, ice cream, shirt—Japan has assimilated Indian (Buddhist Sanskrit expressions), Cambodian, Javanese, and Malayan as well as a few Korean and Ainu words, words which now form an integral and harmonious part of her interesting language. As a result of the leading role now played by Japan in the entire East Asiatic sphere, expressions and terms from almost all the languages of this sphere have in the last two years been introduced into Japanese. Minoru Umegaki mentions among others copra, durian, mangga, mandi, and sarong. But by far the most important part in the Japanese language is played by the words, terms, and expressions which, together with their characters, were borrowed from the Chinese and Japanized. They are known in Japanese as *kango* (漢語)

in contrast to the *Yamato-kotoba*, the original, primary words of the Japanese language.

Just as Japan has become East Asia's mentor, the Japanese language will in future become the main medium of communication in this area. The objection has been raised—also on the part of some Japanese—that this language is too difficult for such a purpose, and that simpler languages such as Malayan or even English would lead more quickly to a linguistic unification of Greater East Asia. In common with the majority of Japanese experts, we cannot subscribe to this opinion. Today, the German language dominates Europe, although English, Spanish, Italian, and even French are simpler than German. In the same way, millions of Chinese, Malays, Javanese, Thais, and Burmese are now learning Japanese. Most of them are already acquainted with the Chinese language. Especially the Chinese learning Japanese, in addition to knowing the characters, expect to recognize countless well-known words in Japanese which Japan has borrowed from China. But a disappointment is in store for them! No wonder, for most of the *kango* originate from past centuries with different pronunciations and different usage—and, moreover, from South China instead of from the North!

A RIDDLE SOLVED

Let us imagine a Japanese soldier, in private life a peasant or a fisherman, making friends with two Chinese schoolboys in Peking. In writing, they have no difficulty in making themselves understood, but orally they get nowhere! So the soldier takes a piece of chalk and draws some characters on the sidewalk. He starts with the word "chalk" itself (白墨). He repeats: *hakuboku*—you must be able to understand *that*; it's a *kango*, a word taken from the Chinese? Indeed, they do understand the characters "white inkstone," but the pronunciation? Shouldn't it be *pai-mo* or at least something

similar? No, it is pronounced *hakuboku* and nothing else in Japanese, and little Lu can grasp this no better than young Chen.

Now their classmate Ah Sheng happens to come along, whose family is from Canton. He maintains that these two characters are pronounced *paak-mak*, not *pai-mo*. If he had chanced to be from Fukien, he would say *peh-bak*. Now we are beginning to approach the Japanese sound of the word for chalk: "b," "p," "f," and "h" are closely related sounds—the Thailander can never agree with a foreigner whether a Thai or European word starts with "p" or "b." Like the Spaniard, the Japanese pronounces "f" bilabially, i.e., not like most Occidentals do between the lower lip and the upper teeth but between both lips so that it comes out as a sort of mixture between "h" and "f." "M" and "b" (both labial sounds) are also brothers. So we arrive at *hak-bak* for "chalk"—the final "u" in Japanese, as we have said before, is often inaudible, the place-name Kusatsu being pronounced like "Ksats"; and the changeability of vowels was to be seen from many of the examples of migrating words shown above—the result being: *hakuboku* (q.e.d.).

Let us now take the word *shimbun*, so familiar today all over East Asia, or rather, *shimbun-shi*, meaning "newspaper" (*shimbun*=news). The appropriate characters (新聞紙) are pronounced in North China *hsin-wen-chih*; similar, but not very, is it? Here again the key is to be found in South China: the Cantonese *san-man-chi*, the Hakka *sin-vun-chi*, and finally the Fukienese *sin-bun-chi*! The call *banzai*! (ten thousand years of life, 萬歲) is pronounced *wan-sui* in North China, *maan-sui* in Canton, *ban-hoe* in Fukien, and *wan-soi* by the Hakkas. "Virtue" (德) is pronounced *te* in North China and has turned via the Hakka *tet*, the Fukienese *tek*, and the Cantonese *tak* into the Japanese *toku*. It is interesting to compare the numbers:

	North China	Hakka	Canton	Fukien	Japanese	Sino- Annamese	Thai
1	i	yit	yat	chit	ichi	nhat	nung
2	erh	ngi	i	ji	ni	nhi	song
3	san	sam	saam	san	san	tam	sam
4	szu	si	sz	si	shi	tu	si
5	wu	ng	ng	go	go	ngu	ha
6	liu	liuk	luk(lok)	lak	roku	luc	hok
7	ch'i	chhit	ts'at	chit	shichi	that	chet
8	pa	pat	paat	poeh	hachi	bat	bät
9	chiu	kiu	kau	kau	ku	cuu	gau
10	shih	ship	shap	chap(sip)	ju	thap	sib
11	shih-i	ship-yit	shap-yat	chap-it	ju-ichi	thap-nhat	sib-et
20	erh-shih	ngi-ship	i-shap	ji-chap	ni-ju	nhi-thap	yi-sib

REPAYMENT IN KIND

It would be wrong, however, to assume that Japan has never been anything but receptive in linguistic respects. Since the first half of the last century, Japan has created countless new biological, medical, and other scientific terms which, in turn, have in many cases been adopted by Chinese-speaking scientists. For reasons of greater brevity and pithiness, and since the Chinese characters were in any case indispensable, the Japanese chose *kango*, i.e., Sino-Japanese terms, and not *Yamato-kotoba*. The ancient Chinese word *lai-ping* (癩病), for instance, which was first employed in China for leprosy in 278 A.D., was introduced into Japan in the seventh century as *raibyō*. In the meantime, several other expressions were used for leprosy in China, the one most often used in recent times being *ma-feng* (麻瘋). Now, however, *raibyō/lai-ping* has returned to China as a technical term, and with it many other word-formations such as *rai-kessetsu* (癩結節), Chinese *lai-chieh* (-chieh), for leprosy nodules, etc. Many other word formations have also migrated from Japan to China, as, for instance 代理商 = commercial agent, 外相 = foreign minister, 意匠 = design, all of them newly formed words originating in Japan. Times of war have always proved particularly fertile in creating new terms and expressions; Japan coined *kaki* (火器: the Cantonese would pronounce it *foh-hei*) for "firearm"; *gin-yoku* (銀翼: Cantonese *ngan-yik*, Fukienese *gin-ek*) for "silver wings"; and many other terms, thus repaying China in kind for the words borrowed from her language.

TRACES OF THE PAST

Languages and words not only migrate, often hurrying ahead of human migration; they also stay behind and bear witness to the past. The old Roman Empire has

perished—the Latin language lives on among the scientists of all continents, even in regions which never saw a Roman. In the same way, ancient Greek, ancient Ethiopian, and ancient Bulgarian (old Slavic church script) bear witness to vanished cultures, the former also in scientific nomenclature, the latter two as the languages of religion.

Language, racial, and national borders are rarely identical. Thousands of kilometers separate China from Turkey (although there are Turk peoples living very much closer to China, Central Asia generally being regarded as the original home of all Turks). But the domains of the Chinese and Turkish languages adjoin each other. You did not know that? Open an atlas at "Central Asia": not far from the Western border of Ningsia you will find the name "Bilgöchi," which is composed of two genuine Turkish (or Turk) words. You will find many names with *ak-* (Turkish: white), *hara-* (black), *kysyl-* (gray); for instance, north of Lake Aral, *Karakum* (black valley)—*Karakorum* is also a Turk word, and in *Usbekistan* there is *Kysylkum*, the "gray valley." *Altyn-dagh* in northern Tibet is the "golden mountain"; north of Lhasa there is *Tengri-nor*: *nor* is a Mongol word, but *tengri* (*tangry*) is Turkish, meaning "God," so that *Tengri-nor* is the "lake of God." *Atbasar* in *Kasakistan* is the "horse market"—*at* is the Turk word for "horse," while *basar* is Persian (*bazaar*); the Malays say *pasar*.

So we see that in Central Asia—the "cradle of mankind," the "navel of the world"—cultural currents from all parts of the old world cross each other and reflect: from and to East Asia, India, Persia, Arabia, and the Occident. The study of word migrations and the changes these words undergo make it possible for the etymologist to trace high points in bygone cultures and to aid the historian in setting down the chronicle of mankind.

Hollywood Statistics

O. E. Brand, Justice of the Peace of Los Angeles' Fourth District, which includes Hollywood, recently performed his 30,000th marriage ceremony. Mr. Brand is a conscientious man who has been keeping accurate statistics from private interest and for official purposes. These statistics show that, although he married 30,000 couples, no more than 41,482 different people made use of his services as a registrar. This is to be explained by the fact that 18,000 of the marriage candidates registered—most of them are connected with the movie industry—made their vows for their second time, 6,000 for the third time, and more than 5,000 for the fourth or fifth time.